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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to state how one university administrator perceives with deep concern the future of the discipline of geography in undergraduate education, to explain how administrators are being harmfully forced to evaluate academic programs and departments, and to offer recommendations for minimizing these serious threats. Two factors which will affect colleges and universities in the future are a decline in student enrollment and the abolition of certain student loan programs by the Reagan administration. Institutions of higher education must establish contingent plans for quick implementation. They should now be engaged in long-range planning that will identify particular institutional strengths and these strengths should be further encouraged. Pointless duplication and weak programs should be reduced or eliminated. At the present time academic administrators are increasingly utilizing quantitative measures to determine academic program viability. Various forms of quantitative measurement most often determine the survival or discontinuance of academic programs. There will inevitably be increased competition among departments to strengthen their enrollments. The task of discipline identification may affect geography more than other traditional liberal arts disciplines. The responsibility for the survival of geography cannot be placed alone with departments, which face harassment individually. Rather, the responsibility for survival of geography rests with the leadership of the Association of American Geographers (AAG) and on a national level. The AAG needs to resolve issues of identification and win acceptance in the public school curriculum by moving in new and different directions. For example, the AAG needs to convince states to include geography in the school core curriculum. Another approach would be to initiate a vigorous professional public relations effort with the national media. (RM)

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GEOGRAPHY IN THE UNDERGRADUATE CURRICULUM: AN ADMINISTRATOR'S PERSPECTIVE*

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ABSTRACT

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Administrators are increasingly utilizing quantitative measures to determine curriculum viability. As an administrator I view the approaching decades with concern for geography in the curriculum. Quantitative accountability will increase competition among disciplines. Discipline identification may affect geography more than other traditional liberal arts disciplines. The responsibility for survival of geography cannot be placed alone with departments. The responsibility to meet this challenge rests with the leadership of the Association and on a national level.

Nearly all members of the academy view the approaching decades with pessimism and alarm. Higher education in the United States may be confronted with the gravest challenge that it has had to confront in more than fifty years -- perhaps the gravest challenge it has ever had to face. The decade of the 1980's and the early 1990's, indeed, may spell the end for a great number of institutions of higher learning.

However, the purpose of this paper is not to confirm, allay nor to deny these alarms and concerns, but to state how one university administrator perceives with deep concern the future of the discipline of geography in undergraduate education, and to attempt to explain how administrators are being forced to revaluate academic programs and departments. And finally I will attempt to offer recommendations as to how these serious threats may be defused or at least minimized.

I realize that most members of the academy recognize that the number of available eighteen year old high school graduates in the United States is on a downward slope. The number of eighteen year olds that will be available is known to the year 1997. Further, it is known that the largest number of eighteen year olds ever recorded in our

population reached its zenith in 1979 and that that dwindling number will reach its nadir in 1994. The 1994 eighteen year old pool will be twenty-six percent lower than the 1979 group.

The problem created by the decrease in actual student numbers is intensified by the likely abolition of certain student loan programs by the new administration in Washington. A recent report in The Chronicle of Higher Education made this estimate: "College enrollments nationwide could drop by as much as 750,000 students, and about the same number might be forced to change their college plans and attend lower-priced institutions . . . up to ninety percent of the students now receiving aid through the Guaranteed Student Loan Program might not be elibible to borrow in the future and the article estimates that some 575,000 fewer students might prove to be ineligible to receive Pell Grants." (5, p. 1)

It is essential to recognize what we are confronted with for at least the next two decades. Student decreases in all but the most prestigious colleges and universities must be anticipated and contingent plans must be established for quick implementation. Falling student enrollments will not be reversed by new and stepped-up marketing; rather than continuing to deceive ourselves with false

hopes based on groundless data, university communities must establish logical and humane methods to decrease what some administrators term institutional supply. (3, p. 23) Although Wilbanks and Libbee in their perceptive article that appeared in the February 1979, The Professional Geographer, "Avoiding the Demise of Geography in the United States" (12) offered challenging suggestions to avoid decreasing "institutional supply" I favor the conclusions presented by Stanley Pogrow. In this essay that recently appeared in The Chronicle of Higher Education Pogrow asserts that many institutions finding themselves in a "Double-Bind" or a "Catch 22" situation attempt to solve organizational problems in increasing the degree of existing efforts without fundamental changes in strategy. In so doing these institutions exacerbate the original situation to such a point that the probability of finding solutions is practically negated. Pogrow sums it up: "The double-bind approach tends to appeal to large organizations because it enables them to mobilize around familiar battles cries." (10, p. 64)

Faculty and administrators in institutions of higher education must begin now to establish realistic projections of future enrollment levels. Institutions which are unwilling to examine the future critically and to make plans

accordingly are not only incredibly naive but are muddle-headed and irresponsible in respect to students, faculty and staff. As we can presently observe, many public and private institutions are already in direct competition for the shrinking eighteen year old student pool. This competition does not necessarily insure the survival of any institution. As one perceptive administrator wrote: "it results in the survival of the slickest not necessarily the fittest." (4, p. 24) Institutions should now be engaged in long range planning that will identify particular institutional strengths and these strengths should be further encouraged. Pointless duplication and weak programs should be reduced or eliminated. George Bonham cites a report by Bowen and Glenning in his excellent essay "The Numbers Game," that in this period of enrollment uncertainty between growth and decline of the California's public colleges and universities, neither administrators nor faculty can effect to any great extent "adverse enrollment and financial changes in the 1980's. We do not discount efforts to enroll currently under represented groups . . . nor efforts to increase extramural funding. These efforts may well moderate enrollments and financial stress at some places but probably not to the extent that will render consideration of substantial program and personnel changes unnecessary." (1, p. 9)

I believe it important to express and attempt to explain the single most important method most university administrators are utilizing in examining and evaluating academic programs and departments.

Academic administrators are increasingly utilizing quantitative measures to determine academic program viability. It matters little what these information systems are called, i.e., management information system, management by objectives, open-system approaches to management, contingency approach to management, zero base budgeting, modified zero-base budgeting, or some combination of these. A well designed management system for which verified data has been systematically collected over time can be of immense support in the program/curriculum evaluation process.

Table I illustrates the types of information formulated for a variety of ratios that reveals a great deal of information concerning the strengths or weaknesses of an academic program (Table I). Today it is not at all unusual for chairpeople and deans to have to defend programs when student credit hours, student/faculty ratios, numbers of majors or numbers of graduates slip below certain quantitative minimums. Quantitative measurements as an indicator of program viability is not just a tool of the university; it is also an accounting procedure being

TABLE I

1. $\frac{\text{NUMBER OF NEW-STUDENT APPLICATIONS THIS YEAR}}{\text{NUMBER OF NEW-STUDENT APPLICATIONS LAST YEAR}}$

2. $\frac{\text{NUMBER OF MAJOR (GEOGRAPHY) GRADUATED}}{\text{NUMBER OF GRADUATING STUDENTS}}$

3. $\frac{\text{MAJORS}}{\text{NUMBER OF COURSES OFFERED}}$

4. $\frac{\text{FTE STUDENTS}}{\text{FTE FACULTY}}$

5. $\frac{\text{FULL TIME FACULTY}}{\text{PART TIME FACULTY}}$

6. $\frac{\text{MAJORS}}{\text{FTE FACULTY}}$

7. $\frac{\text{COURSES}}{\text{FTE FACULTY}}$

8. $\frac{\text{DEPARTMENTAL BUDGET}}{\text{DEPARTMENTAL SCH}}$

9. $\frac{\text{TOTAL STUDENT CREDIT HOURS}}{\text{FTE FACULTY}}$

10. $\frac{\text{TOTAL COURSE CREDIT HOURS}}{\text{FTE FACULTY}}$

11. $\frac{\text{TOTAL STUDENT CREDIT HOURS (YEAR N)}}{\text{TOTAL STUDENT CREDIT HOURS (YEAT X)}}$

12. $\frac{\text{TOTAL TENURED DEPARTMENT FACULTY}}{\text{TOTAL DEPARTMENT FACULTY}}$

13. $\frac{\text{FACULTY WITH TERMINAL DEGREE}}{\text{TOTAL FACULTY}}$

SOURCE: Adapted from: Mayhew, Lewis B. Surviving the Eighties. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980, pp. 93-95.

forced upon many universities by governing boards and legislative committees.

What concerns me greatly -- both as an academic administrator and fellow geographer -- is just how few faculty members seem aware of these evaluation techniques; moreover, I am not sure that the faculty recognize these forms of quantitative measurement play a large role in long-range institutional planning. Perhaps it is an expression of my typical cynicism that I do not believe the majority of faculty members believe or consider that these institutional management systems will have an effect upon their professional future -- until that is, a program or a department has been threatened with termination.

As Mayhew has pointed out in his Surviving the Eighties in university program planning and budget systems four criteria are commonly applied in evaluating academic programs:

(1) Is there now and will there be student interest?

(2) Can the university be outstanding in the program?

(3) Is the area academically important?

(4) Can the needed funds be secured? (7, p. 107)

If any program cannot meet these criteria then I would be apprehensive about its future within the institution. Institutions that are facing grave financial pressures

generated by steadily increasing operating and instructional costs combined with decreasing or steady-state student enrollments must in some manner solve or ameliorate this financial stress.

Unquestionably as program quantitative accountability becomes more acceptable as a measure to determine the survival or discontinuance of academic programs there will be increased competition among departments to strengthen their enrollments. It is in this unfortunate but very real competition for students that concerns me the most for geography. For the task of discipline identification may affect geography more than other traditional liberal arts disciplines. The history and literature of our field is replete with references to this problem and with evidences of concern for discipline identification. And as recently as 1980, Marvin Mikesell cautioned in his article, "The Sixteen Million Hour Question" that the ignorance of our discipline cannot be an identification excuse and later he hit the point again when he stated: "mention should be made of the problems created by lack of public awareness of who we are and what we do. Worrying about our image is of course bad for our image." (8, p. 447) It seems to me that at times too many of us in the field whine about our lack of identity and believe that this problem

is really not our problem but rather is the result of our colleagues' ignorance about the nature of geography. I do believe that Russell Chapelle was close to the mark when he argued that a part of the identification problem of geography stems from the fact that colleagues in other disciplines remember geography as something that stresses memorization of names and map making. "Geography's image is so fuzzy to those looking in from the periphery that they fail to see us as we really are." (2, p. 65) The identification issue was also touched upon by Pattison and Natoli in their 1977 article concerning the discipline in Change, when they wrote: "You mean they teach geography in college? Yes, they do, but much of it is far from the geography most people think of when they hear the word." (9, p. 100) We as professional geographers must be failing to see or accomplish something, for if not, why is the issue of discipline identity still a major topic for discussion in our literature?

A second central theme that can be traced throughout the history of the A.A.G. and one that I am convinced is directly related to discipline identification is the relationship of geography to the public schools -- particularly the secondary public school curriculum. As with the very early concern about discipline identity, we find concern about geography's role in the public school systems

being expressed at least as early as 1892.

Throughout the first fifty years much of the literature in our field discusses geography and secondary education. However, during this period, other than the actual organization of the N.C.G.E., little was done to resolve the problems discussed.

It was not until the decade of the 1950's that the Association, clearly concerned with the educational issue, decided to actually confront the issue. The Association was clearly concerned with the image of the discipline during the decade of the 1950's and 1960's. During these years the Association not only was deeply involved in the HSGP but also initiated the Commission on College Geography. Other image-educational projects funded during this period were: a joint A.A.G. - N.C.G.E. writing project founded by the National Geographic Society, the Visiting Geographical Scientist Programs, and the Consortium of Professional Associations for the Advancement of Teacher Education. And in mid-1969 Salvatore Natoli of the Office of U.S. Education was invited to join the A.A.G. central office staff as Director of Educational Affairs. (6)

However, despite the efforts of the Association during these two decades, including the decade of the 1970's

the Association has been essentially unsuccessful in introducing geography into the secondary schools. It is not an over-statement to say that most high school students in this country graduate from high school without even taking a geography course in their social studies area of study.

I reject the concept that the responsibility for the survival of geography resides within individual academic departments. We continually hear the same tried and tired nostrums for survival, but these attempts do not address the central issues. I cannot help but be reminded of the quote, attributed to John Nystuen, Chairperson of the Department of Geography at the University of Michigan, which appeared in the March 2, 1981 issue of The Chronicle of Higher Education concerning the possible discontinuance of the geography department at the University of Michigan. "The most critical decision is the first one -- naming the department to be considered for discontinuance. We are damaged by the very suggestion." (11, p. 5)

We cannot let our departments face this harassment individually. I believe the responsibility for the survival of our discipline rests with the leadership of the Association and must be conducted on a national level. We can justifiably be proud of our Association and our

past leadership; nevertheless, we are facing novel and difficult challenges, and I am convinced that if we are to survive as a discipline, the Association must attempt to resolve the issues of identification and win acceptance in the secondary public school curriculum by moving in new and different directions. With this point in mind, I offer for your consideration some possible approaches:

1. To underwrite a vigorous professional lobbying effort at state levels, the objective being to convince states to include geography in the secondary school curriculum social science core.
2. To identify a rational unified geography core for all geography programs as well as to consider the advantages of department national accreditation by the A.A.G.
3. To initiate annual regional meetings with secondary school guidance counselors, the objective to acknowledge the importance of academic advising and the significance of guidance counselors in helping high school students to make decisions concerning their careers and in their choice of higher education objectives.

4. To initiate a vigorous professional public relations effort by the A.A.G. with the national media, the objective being to identify geography as a relevant contemporary discipline.
5. To formulate a committee of young geography instructors who teach recognized, successful basic introductory geography courses, the objective being to identify these scholars then record their approaches and to publish their teaching methods and suggestions.

It is the responsibility of academic administrators to evaluate programs and departments. That is why I am convinced that the survival of our discipline must come from our Association. As a dean, of course, I am interested in learning from departments of their excellence in teaching and in promoting the national recognition of their research and of their service to the community. However, the real issues and answers are: "How many student hours are you producing?" "How many majors have you enrolled?" "How many students did your department graduate last year?" It is a truth, and a sad one, but this is the bottom line.

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